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ABSTRACT

The joint Education Department of the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, Minnesota, developed a behaviorally oriented framework for assessing teacher candidate dispositions. They created an instrument to use in a behavioral assessment of all applicants to the teacher education program. This assessment involved an interview with the director of student teaching or the department chair. The interview was designed to provide a formal, yet friendly, introduction to the administrators and personalize the admission process. Dispositions that the group identified as relevant included intrinsic motivation and passion for learning as well as being disposed toward: helping relationships with children/youth; commitment to social justice and appreciation of diversity; creativity, problem solving, and divergent thinking; engagement in and promotion of positive social interaction; communicating effectively; being prepared; recognizing, encouraging, and facilitating positive growth in others; reflection and self-improvement; and integrity and collaboration for student advocacy. The interviewer asks questions that invite students to reflect upon and discuss life experiences which dispose them toward practices of effective teaching. This assessment method has been effective in focusing candidates on the dispositions that will help them acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for becoming effective teachers and recognizing the need for dispositional change. (Contains 46 references.) (SM)

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER CANDIDATE DISPOSITIONS

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DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF TEACHER CANDIDATE DISPOSITIONS

Introduction

The joint Education Department of the College of Saint Benedict (St. Joseph, MN) and Saint John's University (Collegeville, MN) sought to develop a framework for assessing teacher candidate dispositions. This paper describes the research and philosophical considerations that contributed to this framework. It is this framework that supports the instrument we developed to use in assessing the dispositions of applicants to our teacher education programs.

Standards and Effective Teaching

Teacher Education is in the business of educating, training, and otherwise preparing people to become effective educators. Over the years, our understanding of “effective educators” has undergone a paradigm shift and is now defined in terms of student learning. By and large, we now understand effective educators to be those educators who are effective in helping students meet appropriate outcomes. For our purposes, effective teachers help students learn what they need to in order to “function effectively as purposeful thinkers, effective communicators, self-directed learners, productive group participants, and responsible citizens” (Minnesota Rules 3501.0010, 1998).

Over the past twenty years, the knowledge base for student learning, effective teaching, and effective schools has mushroomed. In consideration of this growing knowledge base, professional associations, accrediting agencies, state education officers, legislators, and boards of teaching have created, modified, further revised, and codified

performance-based “standards” which prescribe all that students should know and be able to do from each particular agency’s vantage point. Teacher Education is a critical player in this standards movement, and has itself become standards based in prescribing what teacher candidates should know and be able to do. Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education (SCDE) have responded to agencies of state licensure and national accreditation by adopting standards for teacher education to demonstrate that teacher candidate graduates from each of their respective programs possess the prescribed knowledge and skills identified as essential to effective teaching.

While there is much that is laudable about these standards (including the standards for teacher education), it may indeed be that the effort to create standards for knowledge and skills as measured by performance outcomes is more laudable than are the standards themselves. The standards, after all, are discrete statements that merely seek to define desirable knowledge and skills that are measurable. The process of striving to create ever better standards can be a means of clarifying the understanding and articulation of desired learning outcomes. At the same time, the quantification of learning outcomes to facilitate the ease with which they can be measured very often minimizes the quality of those learning outcomes.

There is, for example, a domain of learning and teaching beyond knowledge and skills that is equally as important but much less measurable—especially over a short period of time, such as a day, a week, or a year. This is the domain of “affect.” Affect includes the qualitative aspects of aesthetic perception, beliefs, values, and the passion that drives them. Affect can be seen as goodness, zeal, and style. In teaching, affect can be a charisma that, when used to draw students into relationships that are supported by

knowledgeable, skilled and caring teachers, transforms those students into passionate, life-long learners who are committed to and skillfully engaged in life, relationships, and the world around them.

The challenge, and indeed, the delight of teacher educators is to keep sacred and not lose sight of their responsibility of helping teacher candidates develop their affect or charisma. This is an especially daunting challenge as the cumbersome and complicated legislated standards of knowledge and skill might be seen as the very antithesis of charisma. Today, teacher educators name this important area of teacher development “dispositions.”

Defining Dispositions

“Disposition” was once a psychological term that referred to the probability or likelihood that a certain form of behavior would occur (Bartussek, 1972). The term preferred by psychologists today is “trait”, referring to a “characteristic or quality distinguishing a person or (less commonly) a thing, especially a more or less consistent pattern of behaviour that a person possessing the characteristic would be likely to display in relevant circumstances, typical examples being *shyness, honesty, tidiness, and stupidity*” (Colman, 2001). The common thread for teacher educators is that traits or dispositions are dimensions of human personality that have a consistency about them and are characterized, exemplified, or typified in behavior patterns.

Research Review on Teacher Dispositions

Ryans (1960) directed a major research study on the characteristics of teachers which included dispositions such as *attitudes* toward children, toward other persons with

whom teachers frequently come in contact, and toward “democratic classroom practices”

The study also investigated *teachers' educational viewpoints* and *beliefs* regarding “the relative importance of providing instruction in the fundamentals and traditional subject matter as compared with other objectives espoused by schools; about the emphasis to be placed on academic achievement and high standards of accomplishments; about teacher participation in other than strictly instructional responsibilities.” Ryan did not find correlations between these attitudes, viewpoints, or beliefs and teaching effectiveness.

Getzels and Jackson (1963) surveyed extensive research on teacher personality and characteristics including attitudes, values, interests, and favored activities. They identified only “pedestrian findings” in seeking the relationship of these variables with teaching effectiveness.

Gooding (1969) working with Arthur Combs on the “Florida Studies” found correlations between teacher effectiveness and their “perceptual organization” which included “perceptions of people and their behavior,” “perceptions of self,” “perceptions of others,” “perceptions of the teaching task,” and “a general frame of reference.”

Hamacheck (1972) studied the reactions of high school students to different teacher personality types finding evidence to “suggest that teachers who are warm, flexible, tolerant, interested in students, and who have a sense of humor seem better able to positively affect the attitudes and learnings of students than do teachers in whom these personal characteristics are less evident.”

Rosenshine (1975) reviewed research relating a particular disposition, “teacher enthusiasm,” to teaching effectiveness. He found positive correlations between student achievement and “ratings given to teachers on such behaviors as ‘stimulating,’

‘energetic,’ mobile,’ ‘enthusiastic,’ and ‘animated’” as well as with “the frequencies of such variables as movement, gesture, variation in voice, and eye contact.”

Cohen (1976) reported on research from two studies that found a positive correlation between classroom organization (formal and highly structured versus informal and flexible) and teacher values and attitudes toward a variety of educational issues.

Richardson (1996) reported on research that shifted the focus from teacher attitudes to teacher beliefs. She found that the beliefs preservice teachers have about teaching and learning tend to be formed before they enter teacher education programs, and are not affected by their programs. Differing beliefs were found between elementary and secondary education majors, between male and female preservice teachers, and between traditional and nontraditional students in the programs.

Collinson (1996) described the importance of *interpersonal knowledge* (people skills) and *intrapersonal knowledge* (the disposition toward continuous learning, reflection as well as strong ethics of care and work) in the lives of effective teachers.

NCATE and Teacher Dispositions

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has as its mission to assure, through its accreditation process, that graduates of those institutions have “acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help all students learn” (NCATE, 2002).

Indeed, in the agency’s most recent set of accreditation standards, NCATE modeled its *Standard 1* on this mission:

Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other professional school personnel know and demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to help all students learn.

Assessments indicate that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards.

NCATE then defined dispositions as:

The values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. For example, they might include a belief that all students can learn, a vision of high and challenging standards, or a commitment to a safe and supportive learning environment.

With the development and use of appropriate rubrics and scoring guides, candidate knowledge and skills can be readily assessed in a performance-based manner. Such performance-based assessments assure the competency and qualifications of candidates to teach effectively. But what is to be done about the “dispositions” of teacher candidates? How can we, as teacher educators, effectively assess the dispositions of teacher candidates to assure that our graduates are likely to utilize their knowledge and skills in ways that will truly help all students learn? What kinds of performance-based assessments can be used to assure that teacher candidates “care” appropriately and sufficiently?

NCATE delineates the various components of each standard and identifies proficiency levels at which each component might be addressed. For “dispositions”, NCATE offers these three levels:

<i>UNACCEPTABLE</i>	<i>ACCEPTABLE</i>	<i>TARGET</i>
Candidates are not familiar with professional dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. They do not model these dispositions in their work with students, families, and communities.	Candidates are familiar with the dispositions expected of professionals. Their work with students, families, and communities reflects the dispositions delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards	Candidates work with students, families, and communities in ways that reflect the dispositions expected of professional educators as delineated in professional state and institutional standards. Candidates recognize when their own dispositions may need to be adjusted and are able to develop plans to do so.

The CSB/SJU Education Department fully agrees with NCATE's target standard for candidate dispositions but was then challenged to identify the specific dispositions that should be expected of candidates. While the INTASC standards identified specific dispositions related to each of its ten principles, in Minnesota those dispositions were deliberately struck from the standards in the version approved by the state legislature as the *Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice*. The legislature rejected the INTASC dispositions on the grounds that it is beyond the scope of governmental authority to legislate the beliefs and values that are identified in the INTASC standards as dispositions.

As important as we believe teacher dispositions are for effective teaching, we also agree that dispositional standards should be thought of and treated differently from the other standards that are knowledge and skill based. We want to avoid any sense, for instance, that we will use dispositions as a measure of political correctness or that candidates must meet a standard of political correctness before they will be recommended for teacher license. While we agree that the sensitivity implied in political correctness is an important skill for teachers to have, we want to prepare teacher candidates who can go beyond political correctness (and even Minnesota niceness). We want to prepare teacher candidates who think and express themselves in ways that push and challenge status quo to seek and move to more profound levels of social justice and sustainability.

Considerations for Assessing Candidate Dispositions

Teacher educators typically assess candidate readiness for various phases of a given teacher education program. Candidates are first assessed on their readiness to be accepted into the program. As they go through the program, candidates are also assessed

as to their readiness for student teaching. Then, while student teaching, candidates are assessed for their readiness to be recommended for teacher licensure. Decisions made about candidate readiness at each successive phase of the program consider greater and greater investments by the candidate, and hence become progressively more and more high stakes decisions. These are high stakes decisions for the teacher candidates themselves as well as the students they would teach. Because of these high stakes, though, it is critical that the decisions be based upon assessment processes and standards that have high levels of validity and reliability.

In light of this consideration, we identified three major approaches or schools for assessing dispositions. One such approach is psychodynamic. This approach considers dispositions, values, and basic life orientation to be dimensions of an individual's personality, which in turn is controlled by forces or drives which are hidden within. Dispositions, from this perspective, are revealed as a personality profile through various and assorted psychodynamic tests (e.g., MMPI, Myers-Briggs, etc.). This approach we rejected out of hand. We believe the use of such an approach for purposes of assessing candidates for teacher education to be unethical and disrespectful of students. Such an approach would tend to presume there is something wrong with the individual--and would therefore be an unwanted and intrusive invasion of student's privacy.

Another approach or school of thought by which dispositions can be assessed is from a humanistic or existential perspective. Such an approach focuses on the expressed feelings and/or philosophical beliefs of teacher candidates. We also rejected this approach as we consider it to be a dangerous entryway to political correctness. If candidates understand that anything they say about their feelings or beliefs can and will

be held against them in decisions about their fitness to teach, we will have set up a system in which the savvy candidates will simply tell us what they believe we want to hear. Such a system would encourage undesirable characteristics (e.g., dishonesty and manipulative behaviors) while undermining some of the very values we seek to reinforce (e.g., honesty, trust, and integrity).

A third approach, and that with which we have chosen to work, considers candidate dispositions from a behavioral perspective. This approach has at its foundation the belief that past and present behaviors have a predictive value for future behaviors. From this perspective, we believe that candidates who show patterns of behavior exhibiting particular values or traits (e.g., those who show patterns of enthusiasm for learning, care, empathy, creativity, planning and organization, altruism, commitment to social justice, etc.), are more likely to be disposed to those behaviors characterized by those values in teaching than those candidates who have less disposition toward them.

Before going further, it is important to acknowledge caveats about taking this approach with teacher candidates. First of all, most of our students at CSB/SJU are traditional aged college students. They have not lived long enough nor are they experienced enough to have developed long-lived patterns of behavior or deeply ingrained dispositions. They are still undergoing many changes, and in many cases, have not finished the developmental work of identity formation.

Secondly, when we say candidates who exhibit certain traits are “more likely” to be disposed to behaviors that exhibit those traits in the future, we do not make this claim with one hundred percent certainty. Candidates whom we identify to have desirable dispositions may in fact have life changing experiences that make those behaviors less

likely in the future. By the same token, students whom we identify as not having particular dispositions may in fact develop them in the future. This is not an exact science.

Nonetheless, we believe this approach can be used in a way that is eminently respectful of students if it is used to accept and honor each individual's uniqueness. We choose to use this approach to identify dispositional assets or strengths rather than dispositional deficits or weaknesses. We assume that all students who apply for acceptance into our teacher education programs are basically good people who have some dispositional assets for teaching. We choose to use a behavioral assessment as a tool that will help us work with candidates to identify their dispositional assets as well as appropriate developmental goals. Likewise, we desire to use the assessment in ways that affirm and honor the candidates for their dispositional assets.

We developed an instrument to use in a behavioral assessment of all applicants to our teacher education program. The assessment takes the form of an interview of about forty minutes to an hour with either the appropriate director of student teaching (elementary or secondary/K-12), or with the department chair. Our students apply for acceptance into teacher education (which means the elementary education major, or the secondary/K-12 education minor) while enrolled in Educational Psychology. After they have submitted all required documentation (i.e., a letter of application, data form, letters of recommendation, test scores, evidence of speech proficiency, their own audit of transcripts for GPA's and course grades in prerequisite courses, as well as their plan for skill development) students can schedule an assessment interview.

The assessment interview is designed to provide a formal, yet friendly, introduction of students who seek admission to teacher education to their respective student teaching program director or the department chair. This introduction serves to personalize the admission process for students by giving them the opportunity to tell their own stories that relate to dispositions that facilitate effective teaching. At the same time, though, this introduction gives the interviewer an opportunity to meet the students at the point of entry into the program. In doing so, the interviewer asks questions that invite the individual student to reflect upon and discuss the life experiences that underlie and dispose him or her toward practices of effective teaching.

We have found that the assessment interview provides collaborative documentation that supports a decision to accept or conditionally accept a student as a teacher candidate. In cases where a student cannot be even conditionally accepted because of severe academic or skill deficiencies, the student can still be affirmed for dispositional assets.

We are currently using information about dispositional assets, however, mostly in the context of student advising, and perhaps even on recommendations requested by the student. While possible, it is extremely unlikely that the assessment of dispositional assets would ever be used as a sole criterion in denying acceptance into our teacher education program. Students are normally denied acceptance or removed from our teacher education programs only on the basis of substandard demonstration of requisite knowledge, skills, or ethical behaviors.

The Behavioral Assessment Instrument

I invited our teacher education admissions committee and the two directors of student teaching to work with me in creating an instrument to assess behaviors for dispositions. Our first step in this process was to identify the dispositions about which we are interested. We went through a variety of activities to do this, but in the end we decided that we are most interested in candidate dispositions that underlie or support the ten INTASC principles. In other words, we concluded that the students who had experiences that developed behavioral skills supporting the INTASC principles were “disposed” or more likely to implement the INTASC principles than those students who had not developed patterns of behavior that support those principles.

The dispositions we identified as related to the various INTASC principles are as follows:

INTASC Principle #1: The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.

Related disposition:

- *The candidate has an intrinsic motivation and passion for learning.*

INTASC Principle #2: The teacher understands how children learn and develop, and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social and personal development

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward helping relationships with children/youth.

INTASC Principle #3: The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward a commitment to social justice that is supported by the desire to understand and appreciate various dimensions of human diversity

INTASC Principle #4: The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward creativity, problem solving, and/or divergent thinking.

INTASC Principle #5: The teacher uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward engagement in and promotion of positive social interaction.

INTASC Principle #6: The teacher uses knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward effective communication.

INTASC Principle #7: The teacher plans instruction based upon knowledge of subject matter, students, the community, and curriculum goals

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward being prepared as illustrated by organization and planning, goal setting, follow-through, and regular as well as punctual attendance.

INTASC Principle #8: The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward recognizing, encouraging and/or facilitating positive growth in others.

INTASC Principle #9: The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed to reflection and self-improvement.

INTASC Principle #10: The teacher fosters relationships with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.

Related disposition:

- The candidate is disposed toward integrity and collaboration for student/child advocacy.

After identifying specific dispositions for each principle, we created a menu of behaviorally-oriented lead questions intended to prompt the interviewee to speak of experiences that suggest the presence of identified dispositions. The lead questions are open-ended and followed with questions that probe for evidence of the significance of the behavior or the strength of the skill in terms of *frequency, duration, intensity, and conditions* (Carey, 1990).

“Frequency” refers to how often a behavior occurs, or a skill is utilized. An applicant with relatively more experience working with adolescents in a helping capacity may be more disposed toward helping relationships with youth than applicants who have had significantly less experience that is, unless the duration, intensity, or conditions of the experience would suggest that it was a very significant helping relationship.

“Duration” refers to how long or how long ago the behavior occurred or the skill was utilized. An applicant who taught swimming lessons for three hours a day over a three-week period may have developed a stronger disposition for helping kids than the applicant who taught swimming lessons for only one hour a day. Or, a sophomore applicant who volunteered to help out in a homeless shelter earlier this year may have a stronger disposition toward addressing children’s needs than a sophomore applicant who volunteered to help out in a homeless shelter while a junior in high school and never went back.

“Intensity” refers to the quality or importance of the experience in the applicant’s life. An applicant who learned American Sign Language to be able to communicate with a brother or sister who is hearing impaired may have a stronger disposition to being attentive to addressing the needs of diverse learners than the applicant who has had less intense experiences with diverse learners.

“Conditions” refers to the context in which the experience occurred. Applicants who read three exciting books not required for a class may be more disposed toward a love of reading than those applicants who only have time to read required books.

During the interview, the interviewer selects one of the lead questions from the menu as a prompt for the applicant an opportunity to talk about his or her experiences. If the applicants have not had prior access to the questions, it is presumed that they will respond to the question by describing experiences that are most significant to them. All responses should be respected and unless the responses indicate little experience in that area on the part of the applicant the questions should be pursued with follow-up questions that will provide evidence of the significance of the experience in terms of frequency,

duration, intensity, and conditions. If the applicant indicates little or no significant experience to address the question, or if the applicant otherwise shows signs of struggling to come up with something, another question from the menu should be selected rather than frustrate the applicant with a line of questioning that goes nowhere. Again, the point of the assessment is to affirm the candidate's appropriate dispositions rather than to highlight missed opportunities.

Conclusion

The approach we have taken to assessing candidate dispositions is honest, respectful, and non-intrusive. While we make no claims that our assessment provides more than supportive evidence of the presence of appropriate dispositions, the process serves our candidates and our program well. That is to say, the interview process focuses our candidates on the dispositions that will help them acquire the knowledge and develop the skills they will need to be effective teachers. It also supports them in recognizing, when appropriate, the need for dispositional change. In addition, as we treat our applicants and their stories of personal narrative with respect and dignity in this assessment process; we affirm our acceptance of the applicants as persons of value. In doing this, we lay the foundations of trust and integrity in our relationships with them that we hope will grow as they work and move their way through our program as teacher candidates.

NOTE: A copy of the CSB/SJU Teacher Candidate Disposition Instrument is available from the author.

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